

A: GOSPEL SHARING

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GOSPEL SHARING IS DIGGING THE TREASURE

(Step 2 and 3 of Gospel Sharing)

TOPICS OF ASIPA TEXTS:

A : GOSPEL SHARING (7 steps)

B : SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

C : A PARTICIPATORY CHURCH

D : TRAINING FOR PARISH TEAMS

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AsIPAA: GOSPEL SHARING
Programmes for Training the Christian Community

A\2

GOSPEL SHARING IS DIGGING THE TREASURE

(Step 2 and 3 of Gospel Sharing)

Prepare Beforehand

- Bibles for all participants (or copied texts)
- Card of the 7 step method of gospel sharing
- Small pieces of paper with the following quotations:
Mat 5,14-15; Mat 18, 19-20; Luke 10,23-24; Isaiah 55,10-11.

INTRODUCTION

For many groups in the Church, gospel sharing has become the spiritual basis for their meetings, e.g. in Small Christian Communities, Church committees and councils. Sometimes, however, the spirit of gospel sharing is destroyed when the steps are used superficially or when they are changed before their deeper meaning is fully understood.

In this session we would like to discover the spiritual depth of gospel sharing. We shall do this by searching together for the deeper meaning of steps 2 and 3.

"WE READ THE TEXT"

In step 2 of the 7-Step Gospel Sharing method the facilitator announces the text which is to be read from scripture.

After we have invited Jesus in a prayer, please note how we announce the text.

1. Will one or two, please, invite Jesus in a prayer.

2. We read the text

- Please open Matthew, chapter 20
I repeat: Matthew, chapter 20.—

[Please note that I do not announce the verses until we all have found Matthew, chapter 20.]

- Now, will someone read verses 29 -34 slowly and prayerfully. I repeat: verses 29 -34.—

[After the text has been read I ask:]

- Will someone else please read the same text from a different version or language.

3. Reflection on how the facilitator announces the text

Discuss with whole group:

Questions:

- *How does the facilitator announce the text?—*
- *What is the reason for this way of announcing the text?—*
- *Why do we read the text again from a different version or language?—*

Supplement:

- We announce the text in this way in order to maintain the prayerful spirit which we have tried to create in step 1. If people have to ask, “which chapter, which verse” the spiritual atmosphere can easily be destroyed.
- We want to find the text together!
- We read the text again from a different version or from a different language in order to accommodate all language groups and make them feel at home. This is important even if all could understand one common language.
- A different translation throws a different light on a text and helps us to understand the text better.

4. Deeper meaning of “reading the text”

Summary:

- By “reading the text” prayerfully in a group of believers we “proclaim” it. The words of scripture become a “quasi-sacramental sign” of the Lord’s presence. This means the words of scripture become physical (audible) signs of his presence, similar to bread and wine at the Eucharist.
- By “proclaiming the text”, the same thing happens as happened in the synagogue of Nazareth: After the Lord had proclaimed the text from Isaiah he sat down and said, “This passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read” (Luke 4,21).
- The text in the Bible is God’s love-letter to us. The many words of a love-letter make the one who writes to us present.
- We read a letter from somebody whom we love over and over again even though we grasp the “information” in the letter very quickly. By reading the letter again we have a means of remaining in the presence of the one who wrote the letter.

This is also the purpose of reading the biblical text more than once in step 2 of gospel sharing. The text becomes a means of coming into contact with Christ and remaining in his loving presence.

5. **We practise announcing the text**

- Distribute among the participants small pieces of paper with:
“Mt 5,14-15”;
“Lk 10,23-24”;
“Mt 18,19-20”;
“Is 55,10-11”.
- Those who have received the paper should announce step 2, including the reading of the text twice.
- The whole group evaluates each case, keeping in mind how the facilitator has demonstrated it.
- Announcing step 2 is repeated by the same person if it was not done too well.—

Now we shall continue with step 3 of gospel sharing:

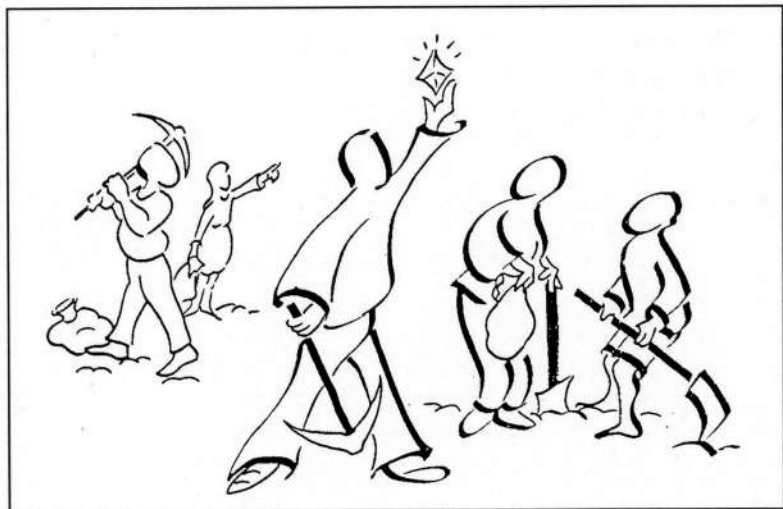
B. "WE PICK OUT WORDS"

In step 3 of gospel sharing we pick out words or short phrases of the text and remain with them for a while. This is the place where we are "digging the treasure" and looking at it with wonder.

1. The words of scripture are like precious stones

The words or short phrases the group is "picking out" are like precious stones or "diamonds" hidden in the text.

Look at this drawing: We see some friends searching for diamonds or precious stones in the ground.



Questions:

- *Describe all the details of the drawing. —*
- *Why do people show their diamonds to each other? —*

- **Why do they stop working when one of them has found a precious stone? —**

The same should happen when we “pick out words or short phrases” from the text of scripture. It is for this reason that we call step 3 of gospel sharing “digging the treasure”. If this step is not done well the whole spirit of gospel sharing can easily be destroyed.

2. An example of how to “pick out words or short phrases”

Let me give you an example of how we pick out words or short phrases after we have read the text.

- I will repeat each word three times and keep silence in between. This pause in between the repetitions will be long enough for us to repeat the same word once or twice in the silence of our heart.
- While I am picking out the words, please (look at the picture below) listen to them in silence, admire them like precious stones which we have found in the text.



Please open **Matthew, chapter 20**

Would someone please read verses 29-34 slowly and prayerfully —

TWO BLIND MEN,

two blind men,

two blind men. (silence)

TWO BLIND MEN,

two blind men,

two blind men. (silence)

TWO BLIND MEN,

two blind men,

two blind men. (silence)

TAKE PITY ON US... 3x (silence)

GIVE US OUR SIGHT... 3x (silence)

3. We practise how to “pick out words or short phrases”

- Each one of us is now invited to pick out words or short phrases (from the same text) and keep a short pause in between the repetitions.
- After some contributions we evaluate ourselves:
Did we do it well? Were some of us too fast?
Did we also leave some pause between the individual contributions?
(We should not say too quickly that we cannot improve!)
- If we were too fast: let us try again with some words or phrases.

4. Deeper understanding of “picking out of words”

Question:

What did we experience within us when a word or short phrase was repeated prayerfully?—

Summary:

- The prayerful atmosphere can easily be destroyed if we pick out a long sentence or a whole verse.
Therefore, we stress the point that the phrases which we pick out should be SHORT.

Which word to pick out?

- We do **NOT** hunt for a word or phrase which we think is the “most important” one for us. If we do that we are in danger of choosing a word which pleases us personally, without listening to God first. Perhaps, God would like to touch us with a word which challenges us and calls us to change something in our lives. This cannot happen if we too quickly pick out “a word which strikes me”. Any word can strike you eventually, let God decide.
- Even a seemingly insignificant statement, for example, “He sat down”, can help the members of the group remain in deep union with Christ when repeated prayerfully aloud or silently.
- After all the members of the group have had their first chance, they continue to pick out other words until the whole text is “dug up”.

Do not engage in “mental exercises”

- While “digging up a word” we do not engage in “mental exercises”, for example by applying a word to ourselves or by formulating a silent prayer. We just sit and look at it.

A concrete sign of Christ's presence

- It is in this step that the words of scripture become “quasi-sacramental signs” of the Risen Lord among us, as the Asian Bishops call it.
- If we are not in a hurry in this step, we can enter into one of the deepest forms of prayer, namely “contemplation” (which is “remaining with Jesus in silent love”).

5. Suggestion: Do steps 1-3 in meetings during the week.

It is not necessary that all of the 7 steps of gospel sharing be used in a meeting. Steps 1,2 and 3 can help to create a very prayerful atmosphere in any gathering.

- Do steps 1-3 in any parish meeting in the coming week.
- After step 3: Read the text again.
- Keep a minute of silence.
- Then invite a few to close with spontaneous prayers.

Appendix

[if there is time.]

C. LEADERSHIP AND THE NEW WAY OF BEING CHURCH

The “New Way of Being Church” requires a new way of leadership. The facilitator of gospel sharing puts this new style of leadership into practice in a small but important way.

The following text will help us to discover the “features” of this new style of leadership.

1. Sitting in a circle

Buzz in the whole group and report back:

Question:

Why do we sit in a circle for gospel sharing?—

Supplement:

- We sit in a circle because in gospel sharing groups we “Accept each other as sisters and brothers”, as the Asian Bishops say. [FABC5,#8)]
- The facilitator or leader becomes one with the group and does not occupy a special seat of honour.

2. Who reads the text?

Buzz in the whole group and report back.

Question:

Why does the facilitator not read the text himself/herself? —

Supplement:

- Because he/she wants all the members of the group to become alive and active.
- He/she does not regard himself/herself as a “dominating leader” who “spoon-feeds” the group and knows the answer to every question.
- The facilitator does not do anything that members of the group can do.
- He/she is a leader who enables people to say afterwards, “We did it ourselves”.

In this way a facilitator is “first” because he/she becomes “last” in the process. Without the facilitator nothing would happen. He/she is needed..

METHOD OF ASIPA TEXTS

ASIPA TEXTS are compiled for Christian men and women at grass root level of the parish. They can be conducted most fruitfully in Small Christian Communities, Neighbourhood Communities, Parish Pastoral Councils or any other small groups in the parish.

ASIPA TEXTS can also be used with larger groups, e.g. in the parish hall - provided the “participatory method” is maintained in smaller working groups.

Features of the “ASIPA approach”

1. ASIPA TEXTS adopt a **“participatory approach”** in which all participants of a group search and discover for themselves as far as they are able to.
2. The texts are compiled in such a way that the facilitator can use them with a **minimum of preparation**.
3. The facilitator is requested to **follow the text** as closely as possible and allow the participants to contribute when indicated in the text.
4. The facilitator is not content with one answer to a question but he/she encourages as many participants as possible to search for an answer. **“Buzz groups”** of 2/3 are helpful to achieve maximum participation.
5. The **SUPPLEMENT** can help add to the findings of the participants and summarize them.
6. The **SUMMARY** is meant to be used as ‘input’.

ASIPA:

As-ian -I-negral -P-astoral -A-pproach

The Asian Bishops declared in the Final Statement of their Fifth Plenary Session in Bandung: The Church of 1990s has to be a "Participatory Church", a "Communion of Communities", a Church that "witnesses to the Risen Lord" (*FABC5,#8*).

The question was, how to promote this "new way of being Church". Therefore, late in 1993, jointly sponsored by the FABC Offices of Human Development and of Laity, a consultation meeting was held in Malaysia. It was during this consultation that the pastoral process for promoting a "Participatory Church" in Asia was termed ASIPA: Asian Integral Pastoral Approach.

ASIPA TEXTS (training programmes) follow this directive:

ASIAN

They want to implement the vision of the Asian Bishops and help Asian Christians face Asian life in the light of the gospel.

INTEGRAL

They aim at achieving a balance between the "spiritual" and the "social", between the individual and the community, between hierarchical leadership and the co-responsibility of the laity.

PASTORAL

They train the laity in their pastoral mission in Church and world.

APPROACH

The process of ASIPA TEXTS can be described as a pastoral approach which is "Christ- and Community centred". It involves the participants of workshops to search for themselves and allows them to experience a "New Way of Being Church."
